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PEAKS OF SHALA

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'Thirty houses I leave behind me,
And into Montenegro I go.
I go to King Nichola of Montenegro;
He will give me meat and bread.'
Durgat Pasha on the top of the mountain,
Durgat Pasha with Shala around him,
Durgat Pasha had no bread or water,
Durgat Pasha's rifles had nothing to eat.
And the fighting men of Shala were all around him,
The fighting of Shala was terrible.
Durgat Pasha went out of his way to Puka.
Puka and Iballa greeted him.
When he came to Bashchellek
All of Scutari came to greet him.
The people of Scutari were frightened.
Durgat Pasha was going to die,
And Scutari rubbed his face with a sack,
Scutari gave him food and drink.
Then rose Salo Kali of Scutari.
'My rifles I cannot give,
I have made *besa* with one hundred men;
Our rifles are not for Durgat Pasha.'
'Leave the *besa*, Salo Kali,
Take your hammer and shoe the horses.
That is your business, Salo Kali.
What have you to do with rifles?'
'I have made *besa* with one hundred men;
Our rifles are not for Durgat Pasha.'
Durgat Pasha rubbed his forehead.
'I have never seen this kind of people,
I never saw a nation like Shala or Shoshi.
What can be done with the Shqiptars?'
These were the words of Durgat Pasha.

"That is the song of Durgat Pasha," said the bandit. "When I came home from the fighting, the men of Durgat Pasha had burned my house,

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and my wife and my sons were dead. It was then I gave *besa* to myself never to hang my rifle on the wall and never to cut my beard until all Albania was free. And I went to fight the Serbs at Chafa Bullit. That was good fighting. All day we fought, and at night we lay by the camp fires and the women gave us bread and meat. All day long, while we were fighting, the women were on the trails bringing us bread and meat. Then we were tired and slept, and the air was good, not like the air in houses. And in the morning, when the stars were pale, we raised the war cry and killed more Serbs. It was a good life.

"It was at this time that the chiefs of Kossova came secretly by night through the Serbian lines to the house of Ahmet Bey Mati, and I was called by Ahmet to take them to Valona. He said that a word would be spoken in Valona to make Albania free. I said to Ahmet: 'The Montenegrins hold Scutari and the seacoast even to San Giovanni, the European Powers are in Durazzo, the Serbs have Kossova and the Dibra, the Greeks are in the south. What is talk of freedom? This is not a time to talk; it is a time to fight.' Ahmet said, 'Before the war cry, the council of chiefs.' Ahmet is chief of the Mati, head of the family that has ruled the Mati since the days of Scanderbeg. He was a boy of sixteen, newly come from the court of Sultan Abdul Hamid; he did not wear the clothes of the Malisori, and the chiefs of the Mati laced

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his opangi before every battle, because he did not know how to lace opangi. Yet it must be said that it was his coming that saved the Mati from the Serbs. He came quickly, killing seven horses between Monastir and Borelli, and he told the chiefs what to do, and they saved the Mati. It was hot fighting. For five months he had been fighting and sleeping on the rocks. His chiefs loved him. 725

"I said, 'I am killing Serbs, and have no wish to go to Valona.' Ahmet said: 'When my father died, my older brother sent me from my country to the Turks. I do not know the trails. The chiefs of Kossova are my guests, and they do not know the trails. We must go to Valona through Elbassan, where the Serbs are. There is a meeting of all the chiefs of Albania in Valona. If we are killed by the Serbs, there will be no chiefs of the Malisori at that meeting. There will be only Toshks—men of the plains.' I said: 'To-night the moon will be dark. We must start as soon as we can see the small stars.'

"In three nights we were at the house of Asif Pasha in Elbassan. No, nothing disturbed us on the way, except that we were obliged to kill with our hands the dogs that sometimes came upon us from the villages. The Serbs were everywhere, and we could not use our guns. When we came to the house of Asif Pasha, the chiefs of Kossova with Ahmet slept in one room, and I sat with Asif Pasha by the fire in another room. Elbassan was held by many hundred Serbian sol-

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725 diers. At midnight five officers with thirty soldiers came to the door. They came in, and would not take coffee. They stood, and said: 'Who are the twelve men who sleep to-night in this house? Do not lie, for we know that they are here.'

"Asif Pasha said, 'This is one of them.' I said, 'I will tell you who they are, but I beg you not to let them know that I have told. I am only a servant, and they are great chiefs. They are byraktors of five villages of the Mati, three villages of the Merdite, and three villages of Shala and Shoshi. They have come to Elbassan to talk with the Serbs. They have come secretly, hiding from the other chiefs. I do not know why. I beg you not to tell them that I have told, for they are tired and dirty, and they are sleeping while the women clean their clothes so that they will be clean to-morrow when they go to speak to your chiefs.'

"The officers sat down then, and one of them wrote. He wrote the names of the chiefs as I gave them to him, and he wrote what I said, that the Malisori were tired of fighting, and had little ammunition, and did not like their chiefs that made them fight. While he wrote, Asif Pasha gave them rakejia, and more and more rakejia, but no coffee. When the Serbs had become foolish I went to the other room where the chiefs were listening with their rifles in their hands, and I took them all by a way I knew, out of Elbassan.

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"So we came to Valona, to the house of Ismail Kemal Bey Vlora, the same who had been Grand Vizier of Abdul Hamid. He had come on an Austrian warship to Durazzo, and there they had tried to kill him, and he had come secretly, as we had come, to Valona. Valona was the only free village in Albania then, except our mountain villages. There was a council in his house. Chiefs of all the tribes from Kossova to Janina were there, and when the council was ended Ismail Kemal Bey brought the flag of Scanderbeg, which had always been hidden in his house, and with a rope he made it run to the top of a pole on his house. It was the red flag with the two-headed black eagle on it. I stood in the street and saw it go to the top of the pole. The chiefs were on the balcony, and Ismail Kemal Bey wept. Many men had tears on their cheeks. In the streets they cried, 'Rroft Shqiperia!' and embraced one another. They said that the spirit of Scanderbeg lived, and that Albania was free. But I said, 'The time has not come when I can hang my gun on the wall or cut my beard.'

"The next night I started secretly back through the Serbian lines with Ahmet and the chiefs of Kossova, to come to our own mountains and kill the Serbs. We had been twenty-two days in Valona, and for those twenty-two days I had not been a *comitadj*.* I was glad to be one again."

For the moment the fortunes of war were with the drangojt; the heavier clouds had been driven

*[Bandit--Analyst]

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among ourselves. There we took stock of what we had learned, and sought to impose a definite pattern on the many projects we had so often revolved on the march, or discussed around the hearth at night. Our first aim from the beginning had been to raise the Ghegs against the Germans, both with the laudable object of killing our enemies wherever and whenever possible, and, above all, so as to disrupt their overland communications: the main road from Tirana to Scutari and its lateral links with Macedonia — the roads from Tirana to Dibra and from Scutari to Kukes and Prizren. These roads were important targets; for the German troops in Albania depended upon them for their communications with the Reich, and they also afforded the second of the two lines of retreat open to the enemy's garrisons in Greece.

The thinkers who inspire, and the historians who record, the course of revolutions tend naturally to dwell on those ideological issues which lend them their distinctive character. In the making, however, they more often appear to the revolutionary, as wars do to the strategist, in terms of power and technique. The first object, therefore, of our reconnaissances had been to discover what was the distribution of power in North Albania.

The strongest force in the land was still the German army, but the roots of its strength were abroad, and our journeys had shown us that its influence was on the wane. Among the Ghegs power lay in the armed might and resources of the tribes, and, to a much smaller extent, in the wealth of the merchants and the landowners of the plain. The strength of the tribes was sapped by their disunity and was never canalised into any higher unit of organisation than the tribe itself. Nevertheless, geographical barriers tended to separate the tribes into distinct regional groups; and, within one or more such groups, they were sometimes brought together by a man pre-eminent among them by his personal ability, family tradition, or wealth. Such a leader enjoyed influence rather than authority; for his following was never more than a loose, voluntary, and shifting confederacy of tribes and parts of tribes, intolerant of any form of discipline. These confederacies were none the less the

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escape from foreign soldiers was no great problem for an able-bodied man fighting in his own country. This elusiveness of the guerillas drove their opponents to indirect retaliation ; they imprisoned their families and confiscated their property, and even proceeded against the harmless villagers who had failed to denounce or to prevent their operations. Thus, in revolt, the heaviest burden fell not on the combatants, as in war, but on the wives and children, the cattle and the homes which remained as hostages in the hands of the enemy.

It followed from this that the elements most naturally inclined to revolt were the young who had no family responsibilities and the " have-nots ", who had no property to lose. To them revolt offered faith, discipline, and a way of life ; and the strength which they acquired collectively in battle afforded hopes of wealth and power in the event of victory. They started from nothing ; their organisation was moulded in the forge of war ; its growth was slow. Prolonged guerilla warfare was thus their natural military expression. By the same token, those with a stake in the country were at a disadvantage in guerilla war ; for their families and possessions were so many hostages in the hands of the enemy. Heroes among them might sacrifice their all to fight for freedom ; the braver sort would run great risks for great gains ; but the majority would only take the field if they knew that their families and homes were safe from enemy reprisals. Without such protection, indeed, either they would withdraw their support from the revolt or else the social order itself would be transformed by the destruction through reprisals of the property relationships on which it was based. The leaders of an established society would therefore tend to postpone revolt until their hopes of victory outweighed their fears of reprisals. At the same time — and this was their great advantage over the other sort of revolutionaries — if they once decided to fight, they would not have to create a new organisation but would go into action with the full force of an organised community behind them.

Applied to the situation in Albania, this theory[1] explained the difference between the Partisans and the Gheg tribal confederacies, and showed that their military efforts must

[1] [Cf. cat. 116, pp. 165-167 -- Analyst]

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naturally develop along different lines. The Partisans had started as a small Communist cell, destitute of resources, and had slowly recruited their forces from among the landless peasants and the youth of the towns. By joining an avowedly social-revolutionary movement these recruits had become outlaws; there could be no turning back; and, since they lacked personal wealth or the backing of a tribe, they were easily subjected to the discipline of a movement on which they depended for their daily bread. With no resources of their own, the Partisans had to fight if they would eat, and thus were driven from one raid to another by sheer necessity. Nor was their zeal for war and plunder restrained by fear of reprisals against property; for they were, by definition, of the dispossessed. Indeed they might even welcome reprisals; for, by adding to the number of the dispossessed, reprisals added to the number of their potential supporters, while the destruction of property which they involved weakened the economic foundations of a hostile social order. The operations of the Partisans, therefore, took the form of sustained guerilla raids; and their movement fed on the devastation which it caused and grew, Phoenix-like, from the ashes of its own defeats. Sometimes they attacked the Germans; more often they plundered their richer compatriots; but whether they advanced the cause of national liberation or of social revolution, the bitterness of their enemies convinced them that they could never lay aside their arms with impunity, except as masters of Albania. Thus discipline was seconded by experience of battle, and morale was fortified by the knowledge that their only hope of safety lay in victory.

The conditions of a Gheg rising were altogether different, for the Gheg leaders were the representatives of the existing social order; and their strength was rooted in the tribal system. Gheg armies were nothing but the tribes on a war footing; and each contingent marched under the orders of its own tribal chief. In the simple conditions of highland life considerable forces might thus be mustered at little more than a day's notice; and each tribesman in them would be a natural guerilla and an accurate marksman. Discipline, however, was rare; the habit of team work unknown; and at every stage in a

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campaign protracted negotiations supplied the place of concise orders. But, besides being invertebrate, Gheg armies were also short-winded; for they depended for their food supplies on the bounty of the clans, and no region could long support the expense of a campaign. The tribesmen, moreover, were shepherds and farmers, and, as such, were continually distracted by domestic cares and especially sensitive to the threat of reprisals against property. To obtain their support, therefore, the revolt must be a paying proposition; and it was essential to show that the prospects of plunder or subsidies would exceed the probable costs of fighting and outweigh the expectation of losses through reprisals.

This fundamental consideration lent certain distinctive features to the warfare of the Ghegs. They required a sufficient extent of territory as a "safe harbour" into which the non-combatants might withdraw with their flocks and movable property beyond the reach of enemy punitive expeditions. They sought to raise the strongest possible fighting force, not only for its weight in the attack, but also to deter the enemy from lightly sending out troops to devastate their homes. Above all, they aimed at achieving a decisive victory in the shortest possible time, so as to win the spoils of war without incurring expenses or reprisals. The Gheg tribes were thus wholly unsuited to sustained guerilla raids which involved living on the country and might lead to heavy reprisals. Instead, their natural form of offensive war was a general revolt, based on the full extent of their territory, supported by the strongest available forces and directed to attaining their objective in the shortest possible time.

We had seen for ourselves that no single Gheg leader swayed a broad enough region or a sufficient following to challenge the Germans alone. But if the five great chieftains, Abas Kupi, Gani Kryeziu, Muharrem Bairaktar, Jon Marko Joni, and Fikri Dine, were to rise up together they would encounter the German army on more equal terms. Their combined territories would provide an impenetrable "safe harbour" where the non-combatants could withdraw with their flocks and where the tribesmen might await military

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supplies from Italy without fear of enemy interception. Their combined forces, moreover, would amount to somewhere between fifteen and twenty-five thousand rifles, which would be rapidly reinforced with mortars and machine-guns from the Allied arsenals. Such an army would be comparable in numbers, if not in equipment, and superior in valour, if inferior in discipline, to that of the L.N.C.; nor was it by any means certain that the Germans still possessed the energy or could spare the troops for its suppression. We concluded, therefore, that Gheg resistance against the Germans must take the form of a general revolt.

This conception of a general revolt had for some weeks been shaping in our minds; and we had already prepared the ground for its fulfilment in our preliminary negotiations with the Gheg leaders. Gani Kryeziu was already fighting the Germans; agreement with Abas Kupi seemed to hang on instructions from King Zog; Muharrem Bairaktar had announced his readiness to take the field if armed; and Jon Marko Joni and Fikri Dine had sounded Abas Kupi to learn on what terms they might now change sides. Starting from this foundation the next step was to reach final agreement with Abas Kupi. Once this had been done we would summon a congress of all the Gheg leaders and their satellite chiefs and invite them to proclaim a general revolt of North Albania. At such a congress Abas Kupi and Gani Kryeziu would naturally exert all their influence to bring the other leaders into the war beside them; and we were confident that Muharrem Bairaktar and the Dibran chiefs would not be slow to follow their example. Jon Marko Joni might show more reluctance but, despite his close connections with the enemy, we doubted whether he would long resist the prospects of plunder, the hopes of power, and the promises of rifles and gold.

Our chances of success, however, were threatened by the danger of a conflict between the Zogists and the Partisans; and this it was our duty to prevent for weighty reasons, military and political: military, because civil war must consume the energies of both resistance movements at the expense of their operations against the Germans; political, because the

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*669 assigned some hundred men to Maclean for operations against the Germans. Meanwhile he remained himself at Mazjhe, holding the bulk of his troops in reserve.

I was at this time some five hours' march from Mazjhe, in the village of Kurat, with twenty-eight Tajiks and some forty Albanians under Petrit. There, on the afternoon of the 5th September, I was joined by Maclean and Smiley with a force of a hundred and fifty Zogists commanded by Ndue Palli, a Catholic chieftain and former Captain of Gendarmerie, who had fought with Abas Kupi at Durazzo. Ndue was tall and lean, with a sorrowful yet questing look, and a way of walking which reminded us irresistibly of a bloodhound on the scent. He proved, however, a pleasant and resourceful companion and a loyal ally.

725 Petrit[1] and I had already planned to attack a German post that night,[2] but now that Maclean had come with reinforcements we decided to wait until the following day, when our combined forces might attempt a more serious operation. In the evening, therefore, we held a council of war and chose for our target a German Battery Headquarters which was commended by its lonely situation and the belief that it contained large supplies of ammunition.

We slept perhaps four hours, and then, with a small bodyguard set out into the night to reconnoitre the German positions. After an hour's march through the woods our guide turned aside from the path and led us uphill to a rounded summit tufted with a clump of trees. As the night faded out of the sky we saw that we were standing on a range of barren hills, running roughly north and south. Beyond us to the west, and perhaps two thousand yards away, ran another range parallel to our own, but lower and thickly wooded. The fold of ground between lay under a blanket of mist, through which gleamed a single light — the duty office of the enemy's camp. Taking advantage of the obscurity we now crawled some five hundred yards downhill to a projecting knoll, where we crouched in the bracken and waited, chilled and cramped, to watch the Germans awake.

After what seemed an age the sun rose behind us, and, as

[1] [i.e. Petrit Kupi, son of Zogist leader -- Analyst]
[2] [in mid-August 1944 -- Analyst]

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the mists parted, we saw that a road ran along the bottom between the two ranges. Beside the road, and perhaps four hundred feet below us, stood a wooden hut, where the solitary light still burned. Beyond, in the side of the wooded range opposite, we presently made out three or four barracks or store-houses. As yet no one stirred, but towards six o'clock a German soldier emerged from the lighted hut and stamped up and down on the road, blowing on his hands. Presently he turned into the wood, and a few minutes later a bugle sounded the *réveillé*. This was the moment for which we had waited, for we hoped that the movements of the men would reveal the positions of the camp. We therefore searched the wood closely through our glasses, and, as the soldiers woke up and set about their several routines, we became aware of a number of camouflaged tents and dug-outs which had thus far escaped our notice.

At seven o'clock six lorries drove up from the south and were loaded up from what we guessed to be a store-house by a working party of Italians, supervised by a German N.C.O. The drivers manœuvred clumsily on the narrow road, and once one of them backed his lorry into the ditch. His angry shouts were wafted up to us on the hillside, but, with the help of the Italians, his machine was presently righted; and by eight o'clock the whole convoy had driven away. Each of us drew a rough sketch of all that he saw, and tried, besides, to count the number of the enemy. This proved a harder task, for the soldiers were continually disappearing and reappearing among the trees; but we finally computed the strength of the garrison at some thirty men. Towards nine o'clock the activity of the camp subsided; and, feeling that we had seen enough, we crawled back infinitely slowly to the shelter of the clump of trees on the ridge above. There, with the enemy positions still in full view, we sat down to concert our plan of attack.

We decided to assemble our forces behind the eastern range two hours before dark, and, dividing them into three parts, to develop a pincer movement against the Battery Headquarters. Maclean, with Petrit, Ndue Palli, and a hundred Zogists would cross the bottom to the right of the German positions and approach them from the north. At the same time I would

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●725 take our twenty-eight Tajiks as the other arm of the pincer and carry out a similar manœuvre, but from the south. Maclean would launch the attack with the Albanians; and, once the Germans were fully engaged, I was to fall on them from behind with the Tajiks. Smiley, meanwhile, would remain on the eastern range with a reserve of some forty Albanians and three machine-guns. With these he would keep the road covered and might complete the discomfiture of the enemy should they try to escape eastwards. Finally, a small group of Albanians were to burn down a wooden bridge on the road, three kilometres from the camp, to prevent the enemy from receiving early reinforcements.

Back at Kurat the day passed slowly, though not without incident. This was the morning when the Tajiks murdered their N.C.O.; a deed which convinced us that, after the excitement of mutiny, their temper urgently required the discipline of battle and the cold douche of danger. Abas Kupi came also to discuss plans; and towards midday we received the first report from the young German officer in the Corps Headquarters in Tirana. This gave us, among a mass of other information, the identifications of the post we were going to attack. It was the headquarters of the Third Battery of the 297th Artillery Regiment. With so much business, there was no time to rest before the action; and, almost as soon as we had eaten, we set out to join our forces, already concentrating behind the eastern range. We reached the assembly point at five o'clock, and climbed to the crest of the range for a further brief reconnaissance. All was quiet in the German camp; we wished each other good luck, and departed each to his allotted task.

In the morning I had agreed with a light heart to take command of the Tajiks, but, as we marched off to the attack, I was oppressed by sombre reflections. I knew nothing of their training or their ways, and spoke besides so little of their language that I could not hope to make them understand my orders in the heat of battle. This ignorance might jeopardise the whole operation; but, as I anxiously considered how to impose my will on these wild Asiatics, there suddenly came

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back to me a fragment from a long-forgotten conversation with a friend who had once commanded an Indian brigade:

"It doesn't matter what you say to native troops," he had told me, "because they won't understand you. What matters is what you do. March in front of them and they'll do whatever you do; and, if you don't run away, they'll be as good as the Guards."

I had been in Cairo at the time, ill from jaundice, and had forgotten his words with the next glass of medicine. Now, by some strange freak of memory, the sick-bed talk was become a counsel of action; and I remembered that Ivan and Mishka at least considered the Tajiks as "native troops". I went, therefore, to the head of the column, though not without some apprehension; the danger from the Germans in front might be part of the day's work; but only that morning the Tajiks had murdered their N.C.O., and I had to steel myself not to look back too often over my shoulder.

We crossed the low ground, where a tongue of woodland stretched out from the western range, and, hurrying over the road, climbed on to the crest of the range itself. There we turned northwards, and, devoutly hoping that the Germans were off their guard, moved silently towards them through the trees. Presently we came to a low thorn fence, broken only by a stile, on the far side of which lay a clearing perhaps fifty yards wide. Beyond, the woods sloped steeply down to the enemy positions. I decided that we should cross the clearing and lie up in the fringes of the wood beyond, to wait until Maclean should begin the attack. I led the way, therefore, over the stile, and had gone perhaps ten yards when a machine-gun opened up savagely from a clump of trees some forty yards away. I looked round to see how many of the Tajiks were already across the fence, and, as I turned my head, somehow lost my balance and fell to the ground. I thought at first that I had only slipped, and it was some time before I realised that a bullet had caught me under the chin. The wound indeed was little worse than a deep shaving cut, and caused me neither pain nor serious loss of blood. The Tajiks, however, ran back, seeing me fall; and I lay in the clearing alone. The machine-gun

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725 was silent, the gunner taking me perhaps for dead. I waited for a moment, then sprang up and ran for the fence. The German opened up at once, and his bullets hissed round me like furious insects as I vaulted the stile and made for the shelter of the trees. The Tajiks rallied when they saw me safe, and, gathering round me, opened a blind and ragged fire in the direction of the machine-gun.

I checked them as soon as I had recovered my breath and my wits, and, more by instinct than by reasoning, worked my way round the flank of the machine-gun post. When I judged we were well past it I lay down, and, while the Tajiks got into position, tried to decide what to do next. It is sometimes a weakness to see things from the other man's point of view, but, as I imagined myself among the German defenders, I knew that they were beaten. After months of inactivity they had been startled from rest, perhaps from sleep, by our approach. Their machine-gunners had seen a few Turkoman deserters, but, in the darkness of the wood, they could not tell how many were their assailants, or where the attack would come from next. Their nerves must be strained by the uncertainty; and, while they would soon recover confidence, they might collapse altogether if I acted at once. The alarm had been given, and I therefore decided not to wait for Maclean's signal but to go in to the attack.

For a few seconds I vainly racked my brain for orders which the men would understand. Then on a sudden inspiration I stood up, and, hoisting my astrakhan cap on the muzzle of my submachine-gun, ran forward shouting "Hurrah". The Tajiks did not misunderstand, and, spreading out on either side, charged through the trees, shoulders hunched and eyes glinting. The machine-gunners fled; we dropped over the crest of the ridge, and saw the huts and dug-outs of the enemy less than fifty feet below. I shouted "Hurrah" again, and the Tajiks bounded down the hill like wolves, letting out blood-curdling yells and pouring a withering fire into the camp. As we carried the first buildings I saw a German standing twenty yards from me, stripped to the waist, with a *Schmeizer* pistol in his hand. For a moment we looked at each other without

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moving, then he crumpled to the ground, pressing his hands to his naked stomach. I had not heard the shot, but looked round to see Achmet grinning from ear to ear. We pressed forward, and, as I passed the dying German, I noticed that he was still a boy, with straight, fair hair and blue, staring eyes. His hands were clasped over his wound as if in prayer, and the blood was oozing quietly away through his fingers. Looking back a moment later I saw a Turkoman stripping him of his Wellington boots.

The enemy now returned a ragged fire, but we had taken them by surprise and they could not see us clearly for the trees. Several of them were shot down; and, as we came to close quarters, the rest broke and fled towards the road. There they ran into Smiley's machine-guns and were driven back, leaving one of their number dead. We were already masters of their camp; and they, too weak to counter-attack, fell back towards the south, sniping us from the cover of the wood.

Maclean and the Albanians had arrived on the scene just as we had gone in to the assault and had at once advanced to the attack. The first dead German, indeed, had fallen to Petrit Kupi's rifle; but, for some mysterious reason, the main body of the Albanians had failed to follow; and when we took the camp only Maclean, Petrit, and three of their bodyguards were there to join us. The rest of the Zogist forces now surrounded us, and, unaware that the Germans had fled, discharged volley after volley into the camp to our anger and alarm. Nothing could stop them; and the victorious Tajiks were forced to take cover from their Albanian allies in the German slit trenches and dug-outs. Unable to make ourselves heard, Maclean and I sat behind a clump of trees and despondently surveyed the battle-field. A few yards away a Tajik was dying in the arms of one of his comrades. Several dead Germans lay outside the tents and huts; and a group of Italian prisoners huddled behind a heap of rubble under Mishka I's watchful eye. Spent shots whined around us, and it was beginning to grow dark. I felt suddenly tired and intolerably thirsty.

More than half an hour must have passed before Petrit

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managed to persuade the Zogists to cease fire. Night had already fallen, and it was now too dark to plunder the camp systematically. We told the men, therefore, to carry off such supplies as were easily portable, and, retiring across the road, climbed towards the eastern range. There we found Smiley and Ndue Palli, who produced a most welcome flask of *raki*. We sat down to enjoy it, and were discussing the next move when suddenly a flare burst in the sky above us, casting a lurid, metallic light over the hillside. A moment later two mortar bombs fell quite close, followed by a burst of tracer bullets fired at long range. German reinforcements had arrived; and, withdrawing slowly beyond the range, we trekked back to Kurat.

We had at last drawn blood; and a Zogist officer with a Tajik lay among the dead to show the Germans who had been their enemies. At least ten Germans had been killed and twelve Italians from the labour corps captured. One Tajik and one Albanian had also been wounded. The honours of the day went to the Tajiks; and, now that we had seen them in action, we felt convinced of their military virtues and more confident of their loyalty. The Albanians had borne themselves less valiantly, but the fight had raised their spirits, and that evening both Petrit and Ndue Palli eagerly discussed plans for the next attack.

We went early to bed, but, while it was still night, I was startled from a fathomless sleep by the wail and burst of a mortar bomb. It was 3 A.M., and the room was already empty, save for Kolaver, who sat cross-legged in a corner watching over me.

"That was already the third bomb," he said with a smile. "It is good to sleep so soundly."

I dressed hurriedly, and, going out to where the Tajiks were encamped, found Maclean and Smiley walking up and down in the moonlight. They reckoned that the Germans were preparing a counter-attack, and were discussing whether to resist or to retire. Kurat stood on high ground and the Tajiks had already taken up defensive positions. The village elders,